

438
THE
FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
EXPLAINED:

OR,
PLAIN REASONS
FOR BEING
A Protestant Dissenter.

WITH A
SERIOUS EXHORTATION
TO THE
PRACTICE of RELIGION.

By a LAYMAN. *K*

O FREEDOM! Sovereign Boon of Heav'n;
Great Charter with our Being giv'n;
For which the Patriot and the Sage
Have plann'd, have bled, thro' every Age!
High Privilege of human Race,
Beyond a mortal Monarch's Grace.

Fragment by MALLETT.

*Be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that
asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you.*
1 Pet. iii. 15.

L O N D O N,
Printed for SAMUEL BLADON in Paternoster-Row.
M DCC LV.

[Price One Shilling.]

FOUNDATIONS OF THEOLOGICAL INSTRUCTION
AND
OF

PLAIN REASONING

FOR THE USE OF THE
THEOLOGICAL STUDENT

WITH A
SERIOUS EXAMINATION



BY
THE

REV. JOHN

OF

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE



The FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY EXPLAINED.

AS Protestant dissenters have been often blamed for an obstinate and unreasonable separation from the established church, it is the design of the following observations to prove that this separation hath reason and scripture to support it. That this may the more clearly appear, I shall first explain the foundations of religious liberty, and then lay before the candid reader the principal objections which protestant nonconformists have to the church of England. It is not meant that any thing new will be here offered, but only the arguments in favour of religious liberty, and for dissent, brought into a narrow compass, that protestant dissenters (who form so considerable a body

in this kingdom, and who are by far the largest body of protestants in Ireland) may see the grounds and reasons of their dissent at one short view, and be the better enabled to give a rational account of the hope that is in them. Whoever would see this matter treated of at large, let them have recourse to the dissenting gentleman's Answer to the Rev. Mr. White's letters. A book which no protestant dissenter should be without. But to proceed.

That we may see clearly the foundations of religious liberty, we must carefully look into the frame and constitutions of our own minds. It is by the sense of right and wrong which is original in us, and implanted in every man's breast, that we are capable of being religious. Without it no reasoning could give us any idea of the excellency and beauty of religion and virtue: what it pronounces to be fit and becoming, we call virtue; and when we do what is good from a principle of love and obedience to God, as being under a law, and accountable to him, this we commonly call religion. As by this sense God hath shewed us what is good, it is plain that he himself is possessed of it in the highest degree, that he approves our acting

ing agreeably to it, and designed that our behaviour should be directed by it: when it is, we never fail of self-approbation and applause, and we may be certain that at last our maker will in a proper manner testify his approbation of such as have resolutely followed the dictates of this divine monitor, and severely punish such as have paid no regard to its admonitions. Now when we think of God as the supreme moral governor of the world, to whom we are accountable, by whose unalterable decision we must abide; when we consider that every individual creature will be rewarded or punished, according to his personal merit or demerit; we will then see, that it is every man's duty to look narrowly into his own principles and conduct: that he is to obey his maker alone without reserve in all things, and to do whatever he apprehends will be pleasing in his sight, without regard to any influence or authority whatsoever. Every man will at last stand or fall by his own principles and conduct, no man can answer for him, nor can any fallible mortal like himself have a right to prescribe for him in an affair where his conscience and salvation are concerned. Why should any man

take another's word for what is pleasing to his maker, when he himself is likewise made capable of judging? It is an affront to human nature, that ever there should have been an instance of this kind. What upon impartial enquiry a man takes to be the will of God, that, as a voluntary subject of his kingdom, he should firmly adhere to, and inflexibly maintain his loyalty to the sovereign of the universe upon whom alone he is absolutely dependent. If our hearts be disposed to know and to do the will of God, proper impressions of him as our governor and judge to whom we are under a law, will raise our minds to a generous independance upon the opinions and authority of others. This is becoming us as men formed with that distinguishing sense of good and evil, from which our first notion of obligation and a moral government is derived. This sense is in us essential and the foundation of all religion and virtue; it is prior to any authority, and can be subject to no law. What honour and reverence is there due to it! How careful should we be to preserve it pure and uncorrupted! How impious and unnatural to offer it any violence! By this immoveable moral standard,

dard, let the firm and loyal subjects of God's moral kingdom resolutely abide : Let the whole of their conduct be directed by it, and let them with gratitude to their maker rejoice in the possession of what no power upon earth can ever deprive them of.

Upon surveying our frame we may likewise find ourselves endowed with reason and understanding, reflection and judgment (indeed wherever there is a perception of good and evil there must also be intelligence :) these powers were undoubtedly given us that we might be properly qualified to search after truth and judge for ourselves: by their assistance we compare things together, and make a free and rational choice ; but let it be observed that what is proposed to the judgment must be tried by our sense of right and wrong, which must always be considered as antecedent to any positive law. In judging of truth and error our minds are quite independant of any authority ; it is impossible they should be subject to any law : by evidence and by that only will they be determined. No man can believe as he pleases, nor can any force affect the real determinations of the soul. The as-

sent cannot be withheld when the mind is convinced, nor is it at all in our power to command it where no evidence appears; just as well can we love or hate as we have inclination, which every one knows to be impossible. Now if a man hath no command of himself in such matters, and that the law of his nature is in this respect unalterable, pray can any thing external, any authority whatever, make what appears to his reflecting thoughts false and wrong, true and fit to be chosen by him? Or with what sense or propriety can any thing but reason and evidence be offered to a being endowed with conscience and understanding? If ever sound judgment and a free unbiassed enquiry are becoming and necessary, it must be in affairs of religion, which are of such importance and consequence to us.

What can any fallible mortal like myself (and who must likewise give an account of his own conduct) have to do with the method which I think safest and best to work out my own salvation in! The truth is, no man can be molested in this respect, without a manifest gross infringement upon that most perfect unalienable right which every man hath to judge what

is

is the will of God concerning him, and we may be sure whenever power and influence are brought into the service of any scheme of religion, truth and virtue are not its only foundations. They stand in need of no such unnatural allies, they have the native ingenuity and best feelings of the heart upon their side, and when they are chosen and embraced upon their own account, it is then we quit us like men and are strong in the Lord.

In a word, when we consider ourselves as moral agents, as rational and free beings, as under a law to God our supreme ruler and judge, we must see that it is upon him alone we are dependant, to him only we are to submit ourselves; being upon all others in matters of religion absolutely independant.

The being who made us hath an irresistible dominion over all. But surely it is founded upon righteousness and wisdom and goodness, as well as upon power or a property in us the works of his hands; we know he will always do what is fit, and perfect goodness with infallible knowledge giveth an undisputed title to supreme dominion. We know that the Almighty is all-perfect, infinitely benevolent, and that he

he will never require any thing from his creatures but what is upon the whole for their good and happiness. Upon this foundation he is intitled to the absolute submission and chearful obedience of all his intelligent offspring. Now should our supreme governor at any time interpose to superadd laws of a positive kind to those already written upon our hearts, in order to render us more virtuous and like himself, why certainly we are to obey them without reserve. But surely before we conform ourselves to any given laws, we must judge whether God hath really interposed, or whether these commands and institutions are really from heaven or not. And here, upon the evidence which appears to our minds, after mature examination, we must be determined. Every thing must be tried by the genuine feelings of our own hearts, by reason and conscience, and the moral perfections of the Supreme being: We are sure what comes from God can never contradict or be contrary to any of these. If upon a fair impartial search we are convinced that the laws proposed to us are from God, why undoubtedly we are to submit to them, to receive them with honest minds, and this is religious obedience.

ence. You see it is founded upon conviction, indeed it cannot be rational or consistent without it. What from an unbiassed enquiry we take to be the will of God, that we are to embrace and firmly adhere to without regard to any human authority or worldly powers. If true to ourselves, we will inviolably preserve our loyalty to the sovereign of the universe, whose commands alone we will obey, and will never desert the cause of truth and virtue, or do violence to conscience, whatever suffering or inconveniences the doing so may bring upon us.

Indeed for a man to be determined by any thing else in the choice of his religion, but evidence, is a most gross affront to the reason of his own mind: for to what purpose had we our understandings given us, if not to judge for ourselves, and to guide us in the most important of all concerns, that of our religion and salvation? Without an honest impartial enquiry after truth, a man's being of the best religion in the world has no sort of merit in it: if he takes his religion upon trust, and is without further search contented with the principles he was brought up in, he might as well have been a mahometan or a papist

as what he is ; and as it is impossible for a man to believe as he pleases, or to withhold his assent where he sees clear evidence, so if men are sincere, we might as well in this case be angry at them for their natural make or complexion, as for their differing from us in their judgments : this hath been, and for ever will be, the state of human nature, and every man who is a peaceable member of society, hath a most unalienable right to make a public profession of his religion and sentiments ; force may indeed make hypocrites, but the religion that is worthy of men must for ever spring from choice and conviction. No man can be called truly religious if he is not so upon principle, his faith should wait upon his reason and that inward sense of good and evil which is implanted in the breasts of every one. The service of reason and sincerity can alone be acceptable to God, in it we truly do him honour and promote his kingdom among men.

To submit ourselves implicitly to human authority, to receive any laws as the measure and rule of our conduct without a due enquiry into their nature and tendency, is a prostitution of the noble powers with which our bountiful creator hath

hath

hath endowed us, and a manifest breach upon that order of things which he hath established. We then profess ourselves the servants of men, and not of the living God, to whom we are under a law, and who will no doubt call his reasonable creatures to a most strict account for the use they have made of the talents he has given them.

Conscience is a sacred power, it is in this world the vicegerent of God himself, and absolutely independant upon all human authority: the enslavers of it are certainly in a peculiar manner odious to the Almighty, as they trample upon the just rights of their fellow-creatures, and presumptuously deface the beauty of his moral creation. It may I think without breach of charity be affirmed that such will at last be most severely animadverted upon. But whatever discouragements and sufferings the sincere votaries of truth and virtue may undergo, let religious liberty in its full extent be ever held dear in their esteem; let the dictates of conscience be obeyed in every thing, be the consequences what they will to estate, reputation, or even to life itself: for surely a good mind would rather lose its existence
than

than its virtue and integrity. It is the voice of God within men, and is the very best friend, or the very worst enemy we can possibly have in this world.

To speak truth, in religious affairs there can be no medium, we must either follow the light of our minds, and obey intirely our own consciences, or else give ourselves up to the direction and management of others. The persuasion of a man's mind is what should ever determine his conduct in matters of religion. What diligence and sincerity he hath used in enquiring what his duty and the will of God is, belongeth not to short-sighted mortals to determine, who can only judge from external appearances. The great searcher of hearts alone can know thoroughly what endeavours have been used, and will reward or punish accordingly ; but this we may adventure to affirm, that if he has been honest and sincere in his search, his errors will not prove fatal or destructive to him. The being who made us knows how liable we all are to mistakes in our judgments of things. A perfect discernment of what is right is not what he requireth of us : A heart disposed, and ready to embrace
truth

truth wherever it appears, nay the very disposition to know and to do his will, is what will always be highly pleasing and acceptable in his sight. And in a word we may, I think rest satisfied, that however honesty and sincerity may err, they will not be rejected by a being of perfect knowledge and goodness.

The sum is, If our sense of right and wrong be the foundation of all religion and virtue, if it is every one's duty to preserve this sense pure and uncorrupted, and to be determined by it in his conduct; if it be prior to any authority, can be subject to no law, and be that which must determine our approbation; and if in searching after truth the mind can be determined by nothing but evidence, if without it it is impossible the assent can be given, or withheld where it is; if (in fine) as moral agents and reasonable creatures, we are under a law to God, and depend only upon him; if it is our duty to judge freely for ourselves what we are to receive as his will, and if convinced to adhere firmly (in opposition to any influence or authority whatsoever) to what upon mature examination we apprehend will be pleasing in his eye: If, I say,

say, these principles are founded on truth and nature, does not religious liberty stand upon a basis firm and impregnable, and which must endure as long as the mind it self? is not judging freely for ourselves in religious matters a right of the most perfect kind? what can power or force possibly have to do with the human mind in its searches after truth, and enquiry into the will of God? or with what sense or reason can power and authority be brought into the service of religion, or any influence but that of persuasion be applied? are not all men under indispensable laws and obligations, antecedent to any human authority, to embrace truth and virtue wherever they shall find them? Is not a noble freedom of thinking and acting, the highest glory of human nature? is not this what constitutes the man? and, should a man stand up singly for the truth when deserted by all, would he not enjoy most sincere pleasure from the applauses of his own heart? Would not the God of nature and of truth be upon his side? would not he appear with great glory and dignity? And how shall a man arrive at such a character, how shall he know what is truth and virtue, but

but by judging freely for himself? Is not religion a thing altogether personal? And what virtue is there in our being of the best religion in the world unless we are so from choice and conviction? Is not conscience independent upon the whole world? Is there not more reverence due to it than to any power or authority upon earth? Can we command its approbation? Is it possible to bribe it into the service of any scheme which it condemns? Or was there ever a good reason given why it should submit itself to any human authority? Can we suppose any circumstance or situation amongst men that shall render it necessary for personal rights which are unalienable to be given up? If we have no power over our own judgments of things, much less can any other. These particulars can only just be hinted at, it is hoped the candid reader will enlarge upon them in his own thoughts. It must surely be pleasing to every good mind to see what a friendly aspect our nature hath upon truth and liberty, which cannot be broken in upon without presumptuously subverting that order in the moral world which God himself hath established.

How

How much is it to the honour of christianity that our religious liberty is so expressly confirmed and established by it! Indeed had it made any incroachments this way, it could not have come from the Father of lights, who, we may be certain, would never publish laws and institutions for our observance which were contrary to reason and the genuine uncorrupted feelings of our own hearts. Our Saviour, who came with full power from God, and who had all authority committed to him by the Father, never made the least claim over the minds and consciences of men, on the contrary he constantly appealed to their own reason and understandings for the truth of what he said; his divine doctrines and precepts came attended with gentleness and persuasion, they carried their own conviction along with them; they had truth and nature for their support, they needed none from worldly powers, nor was there ever any thing like force or compulsion used either by our Saviour or his apostles; by manifestation of the truth only, did they commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. They desired that they who heard them, should as wise men judge of what they said; that

that they should prove all things before they held fast that which was good. They desired that men should search the scriptures, and not believe every spirit, but try the spirits whether they were of God, and that they should be always ready to give an answer to every man that asked them the reason of the hope that was in them. In a word, they advised that every man should be fully persuaded in his own mind, and that then he should stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free. These are strains truly worthy of a religion from heaven, perfectly consonant to the soundest philosophy, and most suitable to the frame and structure of the human mind. Nothing here like hoodwinking or mystery, no claims of power or authority, no pains nor penalties, nor any the least temporal discouragements brought in as auxiliaries to make men christians. On the contrary, it was ordered that the servants of the Lord should not strive, but be gentle. That men should always be treated in the spirit of meekness; and that without love and charity all other gifts signify nothing. Whenever men disbelieved what was taught by the apostles, why, they were left to themselves; and the apostles

B 2

prayed

prayed that God would manifest his truth and grace unto them: teaching, that what was not of faith was sin. They always considered men as reasonable creatures and treated them as such. Truth in its native simplicity they laid before the mind; if it was not embraced, nothing more was done to recommend it, than to set forth the advantages of receiving it, and the favour of God which would attend it.

Christianity, as taught by Christ and his apostles, is a complete scheme of revealed religion plain and simple in itself. The great design of which is to make men good and happy. Surely it can never stand in need of any additions from fallible men: the liberty wherewith christians are made free, exempts them from all human authority in matters of religion and conscience. We are ordered to call no man master upon earth. Our Saviour himself is sole king and lawgiver in his own church, he best knew what was proper for his subjects to believe and practise. To his authority alone we are to submit ourselves, and he only is our proper judge in affairs of conscience and salvation. It has never been well with the christian world, since so many standards of faith have been erected,

erected, and the mere trappings and appendages of religion made the matter of endless heats and animosities. As the great Chillingworth observes, the bible is the only religion of protestants. A credible profession of christianity in purity and charity, a sincere universal obedience to his laws, is what our Saviour requires from all his followers: things which he hath left as indifferent should never be made tests of by the professors of his religion. It is indeed impossible in the present imperfect state of human nature, but that men should differ in explaining some of those laws and in their manner of obeying them. What then is to be done? Are natural rights to be given up for the peace of any church? No, better there were no church, than that the rights of human nature and the dictates of conscience should be destroyed and sacrificed by it. Amidst a diversity of sentiments, which must ever subsist, every man is freely to judge for himself; and with enlarged affection and unconfined benevolence grant the same privileges to others. All who are subjects of Christ's kingdom are intitled to a free unmolested profession of that religion which they think most conformable to the Bible,

and will render them most acceptable to their God and Saviour. But let them ever maintain universal charity to any of their brethren who may be otherwise minded, this being the only natural bond of union amongst christians and men. The spirit of christianity is liberal and unconfined where it thoroughly prevails, it will subdue every thing narrow and uncharitable. It will teach men to consider themselves as the members of the great family of God, to treat their fellow-creatures, as children of the same father, with kindness and tenderness of affection; notwithstanding their different manner of doing honour to the common parent. This is expressed with great justness and propriety by a French writer, his words are, “ Why should I be
 “ angry at a brother who regards the com-
 “ mon parent as much perhaps as I do,
 “ because he does not approach him with
 “ the same kind of ceremonies ?”

Our Saviour understood human nature too well to require an uniformity in religion. He knew that creatures formed with very unequal understandings, of different complexions and tempers, liable to many prejudices, without the same advantages of education and improvement, must in their
 enqui-

enquiries after truth differ very widely in their sentiments: searching after truth supposes this: but here he acted like himself; charity and kind affection are what all can join in, this he hath commanded and accounts the distinguishing badge of his true disciples. Did all men think alike in religious matters it would not look like human nature, but have rather the appearance of force, combination, or worldly policy. Besides, if there must be an agreement in sentiments, pray whose judgments and opinions are to be received as the standards? The settling this point must surely be matter of endless disputation, we dont find in the New Testament (which should ever be the only rule of faith to christians) any infallible interpreter, or body of men, left by our Saviour upon whose judgments we are to rely, or who are empowered to determine the differences which he certainly foreknew would arise amongst his followers: if so, mutual forbearance and love amidst a diversity of opinions, make men and their religion appear like what they ought to be, rational and benevolent. If these observations are just with respect to uniformity in religion, must not all establishments in it be liable

to much the same objections? They are generally contrived and modeled by the civil power for political, as well as religious, purposes; and, it is much to be feared, too often built at the expence of liberty and truth, sometimes but little direction taken as to their structure out of the New Testament. They suppose that a greater improvement in religious knowledge is unnecessary, and that there is no more room left for advancement in it. But if religion be a thing intirely personal, if it is founded upon nature and reason, if no man can be properly religious without conviction and choice, if in chusing the mind has no command over itself, but must give its assent according to the evidence which appears before it; and, in fine, if the sense of right must determine our approbation; if these, I say, are the natural operations of our minds, what meaning or propriety can an establishment of religion have? Can one set of reasonable creatures take upon them to establish their own principles and opinions for others, who, for ought they know, may, after judging for themselves, be of a quite another way of thinking? Or with what constancy can any thing be established which must spring
from

from choice and examination? Establishments make use of temporal discouragements and rewards; were such things ever made use of by Christ or his apostles? If it be said that in some establishments, religion itself, which is perfect and unalterable, is not so much aimed at, as certain means by which the interests of it are advanced, and which have an evident tendency to make men good and holy. I answer, our Saviour never intended that the means of promoting religion should be made the test of christian fellowship; that a sincere profession of christianity in purity and charity was all which he required; and that to make unity in things indifferent (which is the case in establishments) the bond of communion, is unwarranted by the Gospel, which requires only decency and order, but hath left men to themselves in such matters, as thinking any precise determination about such things unnecessary.

As far as I am capable of judging, I can find no authority in the New Testament for establishments in religion. There I plainly see that our Saviour's kingdom is not of this world, and consequently the less of it there is in any religion, the nearer will

will it be to his original design. And, I am persuaded, had men before they took upon them to erect standards of faith and form creeds and articles for others ; had they, I say, divested themselves of all temporal views, had they but entered into the philosophy of their own minds, and made the Gospel the sole rule of their proceedings : had they done this, how many establishments (if not all) and articles of faith, would have been unheard of in the christian world ? Did christians (as they ought) receive nothing for their faith but what reason and the word of God pronounce to be right ; did none claim dominion over the consciences of others, but every man enjoyed his own opinions in peace and in charity, I imagine much more honour would be done to the religion of our Saviour than there is at present, and that the christian church would have a nearer resemblance to the Messiah's kingdom than it ever had. Nor would such a state break in upon any order which Christ himself designed in his church, who could never intend that the natural rights of his subjects could be made subservient to it.

In

In a word, when we look into the structure of our own minds, and consider ourselves as formed for making perpetual progress in knowledge as well as virtue; when we consider religion as what lies intirely between God and a man's own conscience, when we reflect upon the present imperfect state of human nature, how few see in the same light; that it is impossible for a man to tell how long he himself will hold the same opinions; I say, when all these things are laid together, establishments in religion will be found unsuitable to human nature and contrary to reason.

Happy for the arts, sciences, and philosophy, that an improvement in them hath not been laid under the same unnatural restraints as in religion. Wretched then indeed would be their state, sometimes resembling christianity in popish countries, where the civil powers have established and so modelled it to political purposes, that there is scarce a genuine feature of it left. Indeed whenever religion is blended with the civil constitution, and magistrates made the judges of controversy, truth will but seldom have a fair hearing: and some of the worst consequences have been seen to follow from such appointments. I have
been

been the more particular in explaining the foundations of religious liberty it being a subject of such importance, and that the arguments in favour of it may be the more deeply impressed upon the minds of such readers as have not hitherto been so well acquainted with them. It must be pleasing to a generous and liberal mind, to see our liberty in religious affairs so fully confirmed to us by christianity, which itself was originally referred to the free enquiries of mankind. This is indeed a strong presumptive argument in its favour*. Indeed had not men asserted the right of judging for themselves in opposition to established powers, how could christianity have ever made its way in the world? It had dominion and principalities to struggle with: by the force of its own excellency, and without any of the engines of this world it prevailed; the hearts and consciences of men were upon its side. Upon the principle I am now arguing in favour of, the glorious reformation took its rise and was carried on; without it there could not have been a protestant.

* See Dr. Duchal's tenth sermon upon the presumptive arguments for the truth of the christian religion; where this argument is treated of with that clearness and strength of reason so peculiar to this ingenious writer.

Upon this most natural foundation do protestant nonconformists stand, maintaining an absolute independence upon what fallible short sighted mortals like themselves make standards of belief, but a most resolute adherence to what reason, conscience and their bible pronounce to be the will of God ; excluding from their scheme of religion every thing temporal, being persuaded that the doing so is intirely agreeable to the purity and simplicity of the Gospel, which they make the sole rule of their faith and manners.

The church of England is liable to the objections which have been already offered against all establishments whatsoever in religion. There is however great veneration due to it on many accounts, great and illustrious characters (many of them) have appeared in it, who have been the ornaments of human nature, and who with unshaken constancy have suffered and died for the truth.

Our excellent civil constitution, which grants to every man a liberty of worshipping God according to his conscience, is intitled to the greatest loyalty and affection : accordingly protestant dissenters have been commonly most thoroughly attached to
every

every government that was frienly to liberty, and which made the happiness of its subjects the great end of its administration ; and it may with justice be affirmed that their principles and strength have a close connection with the flourishing state of the protestant interest in Ireland.

The separation of protestant nonconformists from the established church is not (as many imagine) grounded upon a mere dislike of certain ceremonies and usages observed by the church, tho' many in their disputations upon this subject have chiefly confined themselves to such things, without attending to what must ever be the great objection to men who understand the nature of true religion, and the rights and privileges of human nature : and this is the power which is claimed by the church, as by grant from Christ, to decree rites, and of having authority in matters of faith. This claim is the grand basis upon which the hierarchy is built. Now protestant dissenters think that such a claim is contrary to the New Testament, to christian liberty, and is in itself most unnatural. If the church could prove herself possessed of this authority, why certainly she would have an undoubted right
to

to submission. But how, or by whom, she became invested with this power is the great question; and what none of her sons have ever yet been able to answer. And if the church hath such a power, how are we sure it is the church of England, more than the church of Rome, or any other church whatsoever? Or, if it is lodged in the church, it must rest in the king or queen as head, and in the parliament, for every one knows that the bishops and clergy cannot of themselves decree a single rite, nor can they alter or amend one: by the present establishment they must proceed according to their directions from the civil power (perhaps it is best they should do so) the question here again occurs, When or where did any civil government come by such a power? For since it is not in the fathers of the church, it must rest there. Till this is made out, many sincere christians there must be, who will disclaim all such unwarranted authority.

The ecclesiastical frame, which is thought to bear a near resemblance to the kingdom of this world, has but little foundation in the New Testament, as that part of it, upon which such a policy is founded, could never yet be pointed out. Indeed
 wise

wise and moderate men belonging to the established church (many of them) have wished an alteration in this respect, and have freely owned that it stood in need of great amendment.

The present religious establishment was contrived by the civil power, the clergy had little or no hand in it. The Common-prayer book was established by the parliament (which was at that time opposed by the bishops) and has ever since been supported by it. Whether such a constitution is like our Saviour's kingdom, which he himself declares not to be of this world, let every man judge for himself. Indeed the unnatural claim of power already mentioned, is of all things most contrary to the genius of a spiritual kingdom, where nothing of a religious nature is ever determined by worldly influence, or a compliance in matters of indifferency made necessary to christian communion. It is hoped from what hath been said in defence of religious liberty, that authority in matters of faith cannot belong to any man or bodies of men whatsoever. There is nothing in all the New Testament to support this; on the contrary we are commanded to call no man our master upon earth, and men are asked why

why even of themselves they judge not what is right.---It is nothing to the present argument, whether what the church decrees, be right or wrong; or **whether** the usages and ceremonies which receive the stamp of her authority, be scriptural or otherwise: no, it is the claiming of such power under the pretence of a divine warrant, the framing articles of faith in consequence of this claim, and requiring a subscription to them, before men can be received into christian fellowship; it is this, with an assumed authority to determine all controversies in matters of faith, which is so loudly and with so much reason complained of; this is indeed the great grievance. And when excommunicating canons are introduced by men who imagine themselves invested with authority for so doing, there is in truth no knowing where they will stop. Indeed any who claim such power should join infallibility along with it; and the church of Rome, which assumes to herself this high character, acts in this respect a most consistent part.

Dr. Benjamin Hoadly, the present bishop of Winchester, who will be had in sweet and everlasting remembrance by all who

visit

C

wish

wish well to religious liberty, hath long since told us in his truly excellent sermon * before king George the first of wise and glorious memory, That as the church of Christ is the kingdom of Christ, so he himself is sole king and lawgiver in it, the only judge of the behaviour of his subjects in affairs of conscience and salvation, and that his laws alone are to be binding upon them : That as he himself hath left behind him no visible authority, no vicegerents to supply his place, no interpreters upon whom his subjects are absolutely to depend, no judges of conscience, nor any invested with authority in religious matters, so they are always to look upon men who make new laws for them, or who improve their own interpretation of old ones as binding, as promoting an interest and church of their own, they are usurpers of his authority and reign in his kingdom.

Protestant dissenters agree exactly with the bishop in his sentiments concerning our Saviour's kingdom ; it is no doubt intirely spiritual, the rewards and punishments which are the sanctions of his laws must

* Upon the nature of Christ's church and kingdom.

certainly

certainly be of the same nature. To understand rightly the constitution of this glorious kingdom, men should have recourse to the original laws themselves, as delivered by our Saviour, and not to the numberless explanations of them which are to be met with in the world, expofitors and interpreters for the most part being less solicitous to find out their true meaning, than to strain them to a correspondence with their own received systems. If men will lay aside prejudice, and abide by the decision of the New Testament, they will there find no other head of the christian church, but Christ himself; no power or authority granted to any of his subjects above others, but all left free as God and nature designed they should. All are declared his approved servants, who sincerely believe in him and obey his commands. And as our Saviour himself tells us that his kingdom is not of this world, so we may be certain that its rewards and punishments cannot be any of the profits and honours, or the pains and penalties of it. If these observations are just, we may safely affirm that a church modelled according to the Gospel must depend upon nothing temporal to render it flourishing.

ing; that whenever a church claims power and authority, it must always be with a view to worldly emoluments; that then it must of necessity depend upon the state, or upon force, for its support, as knowing such claims unwarranted by nature and the Gospel. Such a church will of course have dignities and riches in its train, and at its disposal, to render it prosperous; and it may thus, under the guardianship and encouragement of worldly powers at the head of it, be justly styled the church triumphant upon earth. In a word, we may be certain that whenever we see temporal rewards and discouragements pressed into the service of any church under the sanction of civil power, and a king or queen (instead of Christ) constituted the head or chief cornerstone of it; I say, when we see this to be the case, we may be sure that such a church has not its only foundation in the New Testament, and that other authority besides Christ's is exercised in it.

Our Saviour, who had nothing in view but the happiness and salvation of his subjects, left them all free; he excluded every thing temporal from his kingdom, as knowing that any rewards or punishments of

of this kind could never form in men that faith and temper which would recommend them to God. The motives to obedience which he offered were of a far higher nature, taken from the excellency of religion in itself, the peace of mind and favour of God which would attend the practice of it, and from the prospect of future eternal blessedness, where his faithful and approved servants shall meet with a reward suitable to their integrity and virtue. These were motives worthy of the son of God to offer, and fit for reasonable creatures to be influenced by : nothing like the assuming of power and authority over his followers, to be seen in his discourses and conduct, nothing of this world brought into his scheme of religion, it would have been a dishonour to it and hurtful to its true interest ; he never once claimed a dominion over the faith of his subjects ; he had no ends to answer by it, the reason is plain, his kingdom was not of this world, his church was founded upon truth and nature, it had no other support, it needed none ; for it was intirely spiritual.

What protestant dissenters contend for is not (as one of the greatest divines * which this or any other age has produced, observes in a sermon upon christian liberty) the pulling down of one church establishment, in order to set up another; not the setting aside the articles of the church of England, to introduce the Westminster confession of faith as a standard, not to abolish certain indifferent usages, postures, vestments, or festival-days, in order to make the contrary, or any things of a parallel nature, necessary appendages of religion and terms of christian communion; this, I say, is not contended for, but that things indifferent in themselves, and undetermined in scripture, should remain indifferent in the use of them; that every worshipping society should have leave to settle the external circumstances and order of its own worship; that as to things which Christ hath left free from any interposition of his authority commanding or forbidding, christians should be under no laws but those

* That great master of reason the late Rev. Mr. Abernethy, author of the Discourses upon the being and perfections of God, which do honour to human abilities, and must be held in high estimation while sound philosophy remains in the world.

of prudence and charity in doing and forbearing what to their own judgment appeareth expedient or otherwise offensive to their brethren, or for their good to edification. And did a presbyterian church claim the same power already mentioned, did it require a submission to its decrees, and make this the test of christian communion, did it reject good men (whom our Lord will no doubt at last accept) from their fellowship because they could not, after a sincere enquiry into the will of God, with a good conscience join in the external modes of worship enjoined by it, did it annex temporal rewards and discouragements to the observance or non-observance of things merely indifferent and which our Saviour hath left so; I say, did a presbyterian church exercise such authority, and require things from Christ's subjects which he himself gave no directions about, it would be liable to the very same objections which have been mentioned, and as a friend to religious liberty, a protestant dissenter who is such upon principle, could not join with it, nor wish it success.

The true way to make men sincere in their religion, is to let them judge fairly

for themselves without any authority or influence, rewards or discouragements whatsoever, set before them; whether, as was observed, they have been sincere in their search, or what endeavours they have made use of to find out truth, belongeth not to mortals to determine, but to him who knoweth the heart and to whom all men are accountable. Surely it becometh every man, as in the sight of God, to ask himself, Is the religion I profess the effect of examination and choice? Do I embrace it from a conviction founded upon a diligent search after truth? Would I adhere to this religion, were all temporal views and encouragements out of the question? Or am I influenced by fashion or custom in my profession of it? If a man can't answer these questions fully to his own conscience, he may be certain he wants that sincerity which is in the sight of God of so great price.

Religion is allowed by all to be of the utmost consequence to us. How unaccountable is it to see men so indifferent as to the principles they receive for truth! Many place their religion in attending a round of ceremonies without ever entering into the state of their own hearts, or

fatisfying

satisfying their consciences. Dreadful inattention this to the most important of all concernments! In a little time the scene will be closed, and men, when the glare of this world is withdrawn from before their eyes, will, when it is too late, see the folly and guilt of such negligence. But in how honourable a light will the dutiful and loyal, the rational part of our Saviour's subjects appear! Men of every denomination, whose religion hath been the effect of an honest search; and will not such as have firmly adhered to truth and virtue, and to the dictates of their consciences, in opposition to the unthinking multitude, and in the face of discouragements and sufferings, appear truly significant and glorious in the kingdom of God?

If men are in earnest about their religion, if they really believe in the Gospel, and receive Christ as their king and lawgiver, surely their principles and conduct should be governed by original christianity only. Nothing should be received by them as truth, however venerable or great the church or names that recommend it, if in their own minds they are not convinced that what is recommended is intirely agreeable

agreeable to the New Testament ; by this infallible rule, by the reason and feelings of our own minds, and the moral perfection of our Maker, should every scheme of religion be tryed ; how much enthusiasm and superstition, how many absurdities in worshipping God, how many creeds and articles of faith, and idle unmeaning ceremonies would by this means be laid aside ! The very corruptions and follies which christianity condemns, have been turned as arguments against itself. And the absurd doctrines and practices of many christian churches have not a little contributed to hurt its true interest, and to promote deism and infidelity in the world. What must men think to see churches which are said to be modelled by christianity, making unnatural claims of power and authority over the faith and consciences of christians, and this as by a warrant from the Gospel ? What can they think when they see the honours and profits of this world crowded in such abundance into them, and spiritual instructors distinguished by so many different appellations (unheard of in the Bible) receiving, each according to their interest and dignity, what the civil powers have provided

so

so plentifully for them? What can they conclude when they see such churches hanging upon the State for their supports; and acts of parliament made in their favour, but that they are indeed of this world, and churches temporal and parliamentary, instead of churches heavenly and spiritual? In how dishonourable a light does it set the church of Christ, which is his kingdom, to have it depending upon the powers of this world, for its prosperity and support? Do the great truths which he taught, stand in need of temporal sanctions to recommend them to men's consciences? Or did our Saviour and his apostles ever ask any assistance from the states and princes of this world, in favour of what they taught?

Had men's hearts been as good as their understandings, they could never, under a real belief of the Gospel, have practised many things which are a reproach to the christian name; the mention of such things is needless, because too well known. When men profess themselves the disciples of Christ, there should ever be a consistency between their practices and the precepts which they receive as of divine authority. Strange it is, to see men professing them-

selves

selves followers of the meek and humble
 Jesus, allowing, " that charity is the end
 " of the commandment, the bond of
 " perfectness, that they are not to judge
 " another man's servant, but to leave all
 " judgment unto God; who grant that in
 " every nation he that feareth God and
 " worketh righteousness shall be accepted
 " by him, and that if a man love not his
 " brother, the love of God dwelleth not
 " in him": Is it not strange, I say, to see
 men teaching such things and professing
 their belief in them, imposing their own
 systems of religion upon others, and rejec-
 ting all from their fellowship (however
 virtuous) who cannot with a good con-
 science comply with what is enjoined.
 Is this like that heaven-born charity which
 suffereth long and is kind, which vaunteth
 not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not
 even her own, that thinketh no evil, but
 hopeth and endureth all things? I am
 afraid not, and sincerely wish that the
 imposers of their own religious opinions,
 of whatever denomination, would but can-
 didly and impartially compare their own
 tempers and conduct with the aimable
 and mild spirit of christianity. Are the
 disciples of Christ, who are agreed in the
 real

real essentials of his religion (the love of God, charity, and purity of heart) to make an agreement in sentiment about the externals and ceremonies of it, the bond of love and communion? Is christian fellowship to be suspended till men exactly agree in what is decency and order? This surely is not being kindly affectionate one towards another, with brotherly love in honour preferring one another. Oh that the liberal and benevolent spirit of the gospel did but thoroughly possess mens hearts, such selfish narrow distinctions would then be for ever lost. Sweet good-will and charity would reign in every breast, and there would be none to hurt or make afraid in all God's holy mountain.

If religion was once stripped of the foppery and gawdy tinsel attire which has so long defaced its genuine features, and presented to men in its own native beauty and simplicity, the affections of the heart would yield to its powerful, but mild influence, men would love it on its own account; it would bring the evidence of its being divine and of heavenly original, along with it; and when they were convinced that its service was perfect freedom,

dom, they would engage in it with cheerfulness and diligence. Reason and conscience would applaud the choice, for is not truth and simplicity more agreeable to the heart of a reasonable creature, than error and superstition?

If it appears, from what has been said, that the power to decree rites and of having authority in matters of faith, which is claimed by the church, is unwarranted by reason and christianity; the separation of protestant dissenters is fully justified, and until the church can prove that she is invested with such power and authority by Christ or his apostles, men who take their religion from reason and the New-Testament must ever think such a claim a manifest infringement upon that religious liberty which our Saviour meant all his subjects should enjoy in its full extent.

The reader will observe that in laying before him the arguments for dissent, the forms and ceremonies of the church have not been touched upon, as it is not against such things the chief objection lyeth; I shall however just mention a few particulars which have been thought contrary to reason and scripture, as the doing so
in

in some measure falls in with my design.-- Absolution (which is practised by the church) hath a tendency of the worst kind; and to hear a protestant divine telling his fellow mortal that he absolves him from all his sins, by authority committed to him from Christ, is really most astonishing; is not this an affront to christianity itself?

The form of baptism is evidently so unnatural and superstitious, that I am persuaded had the same been used by protestant dissenters, it would have been publicly ridiculed. Is not the sacrament of the Lord's supper (an institution plain and simple in itself, and of most excellent tendency) prostituted to civil purposes, made the test by which men are qualified for holding lucrative offices and employments? no matter how unprepared the person is, he may eat and drink unworthily for the church, nor can an honest Clergyman refuse him admittance to this sacred employment of commemorating the death and sufferings of our Saviour, let his principles and life be ever so profligate. What shall we say to the consecration, of ground, churches, &c. The mention of this is enough: it is almost

most unfair to speak of that complete system of absurdities, the athanasian creed, since the very reading of it over is known to be so disagreeable to many of the sensible established clergy themselves, some to their honour omit it altogether. How inconsistent is it to see reasonable creatures praying to be kept from all uncharitableness, and in the very same worship repeating over, as their faith, the latter part of this edifying creed? Good archbishop Tillotson wished that the church were fairly rid of it. What offence hath the holding of pluralities and non-residence given to wise and moderate men of every profession? as such religious monopolies can be no other than the spirit of this world possessing men. Many of the prayers in the liturgy have been thought very indigested, and the tedious repetition of them burdensom and inconsistent with the purity and simplicity of the christian worship. I shall not take up my readers time with mentioning other things equally unwarranted by our Saviour. Indeed it is probable that some time or other the ruling powers for the church will amend or extirpate some of these which have been here taken notice of, as it is impossible

ble in an age enlightened like the present, they can be held sacred: but surely till the grand objection is removed, viz. The power to decree rites, and of having authority in matters of faith; till this most unnatural claim is laid aside and given up, and the axe laid at the root, Dissenters, who are such upon principle, and who take their religion from the New Testament, can never be brought over by a mere amendment in such things.

Objections have been made (and with great reason) to the prayers made use of in the congregations of protestant non-conformists, as poor, unmeaning, and unprofitable: many of them have been and are really so; many of them quite otherwise and well adapted to the christian worship; and if one may judge from the great improvement which has lately prevailed in this respect, it is probable that in a little time every thing irrational and absurd will in a great measure be laid aside in their addresses to God. But still as dissenters they have this comfort (and a great one it is) that however poor and unprofitable their prayers may be, they are not nailed down upon them by act of parliament: what is amiss they themselves can alter and amend. They

D

like-

likewise enjoy that most desirable privilege of chusing their own ministers (or teachers) after a fair trial of their abilities in praying and preaching. So that if any thing irrational and unedifying is found amongst them, the fault is their own.

A sensible dissenter hath no sort of objection to forms of prayer merely as such; if they are rational and becoming, it is all he wants. To pay his Maker a reasonable service, such as his heart and best affections can join in, is what he contends for. And if he can find a form of this kind he will most readily make use of it. In general, upon comparison I believe it will be found that the worship of protestant dissenters is more pure and rational, than that of the establishment, which is in many respects shewy and ceremonious, particularly cathedral performances, which are pompous, and by many thought to be unsuitable to the plainness and simplicity of the gospel. Indeed the religion of the body is but too much encouraged by them.

It is the glory of our constitution that under the mild and gracious influence of it men can write and speak their sentiments, and none to make them afraid.

afraid. May protestant dissenters ever maintain a proper affection and zeal for such a government! They have been hitherto, they are, and may they ever continue to be! the fast and hearty friends to his present most excellent majesty and his illustrious posterity. It may with great justice be affirmed they are most thoroughly attached to the best of kings, George the second. And I believe there are but few amongst them who would not upon any emergency defend his person and government to the loss of life itself.

The true interest of all protestants is much the same. And however those of the establishment and such as dissent from it may differ; as christians, let love and charity be preserved, let them heartily unite against the common enemy to both. Let them judge freely for themselves, with minds divested of prejudice and prepossession. Let truth alone be the great object of their pursuit: whatever be their religion, let it be embraced with understanding, for without being fully persuaded in their own minds they cannot be truly religious. The best of men will differ in their sentiments; this is human nature: but in the declared ends of all re-

ligion, such as the love of God, purity, and charity, all must agree. Whoever is adorned with these virtues will be pleasing to his maker, and should ever be held high in our esteem let his religious profession be what it will. A man should be revered and loved more for his goodness and integrity, than for his being of the best religion in the world. In the great day of accounts men will not be asked what denomination of christians they were of upon earth, or to what church they belonged: no, such narrow distinctions will be for ever lost. The great question will then be, what progress they have made in holiness, goodness and purity, whether they have obeyed conscience and sacrificed every thing to its divine admonitions, in a word whether they have maintained their loyalty to God by the practice of universal righteousness, and a firm adherence to the cause of truth and virtue in the world. Happy the man whose conscience will testify for him in these things! Oh that men would lay this matter seriously to heart, and that christians, instead of being satisfied with an uninstructed devotion, and external performances, would in good earnest enter
into

into the state of their own hearts, and prepare themselves for the most awful of all tryals, by the sincere practice of piety and virtue! It is really melancholy and affecting to see creatures formed for an eternal duration of existence, for making endless progress in knowledge and virtue, professing at the same time their belief of future rewards and punishments, yet trifling away life in unprofitable vanities, sacrificing their honour, consciences and integrity to a few transient pleasures which are but as a vapour, or to riches which soon take to themselves wings and flee away. Alas! are any of the possessions, or enjoyments, or honours of this world to be set in competition with a man's integrity, with an approving heart and confidence towards God? Or would a good mind part with its worth and innocence for them all put together? This scene is but our infancy of being; here we are placed in a state of trial, and our happiness or misery in the other world depend intirely upon the part we now act: if we acquit ourselves like men, why, we are possessed of every thing worth wishing for; if otherwise, had we the wealth of the Indies, we are poor and miserable, blind and naked. In a

very little time the scene with respect to us will be closed for ever in this world ; what then will signify the external appearance we made, the part we acted will be all in all, by it alone will the esteem and approbation of our supreme judge be determined. Happy would it be if men would attend to these things as the importance of them deserves. Christianity hath set them in the strongest light. Let us seriously consider it as the confirmation of God's moral government, and live under the divine influence of this persuasion.

If where much is given much will be required, will not these nations, who enjoy so many privileges and advantages, be brought to a strict account for the use and improvement they have made of them? Perhaps there never was an age more enlightened than the present, or wherein real religion was better understood, true philosophy is now brought into its assistance as its only natural ally, and its glorious discoveries made subservient to promote the interest of it. Liberty presides over the whole. What refinements in virtue, what exalted devotion and piety, what zeal for the service of God, what purity of taste and manners, might naturally

naturally be expected from such distinguished advantages? But, alas! knowledge and virtue do not always go together. Lukewarmness, and an indifferency about all religion, the love of pleasure, and intemperance of every kind, are but too visible amongst every profession of christians. A Relish for Religious services (which are so becoming) is daily decreasing, and if some are as negligent of addressing their Maker in private as they are in public, it is much to be suspected their love to God and to true excellency is going fast to decay. Not to delight in God, upon whom we are absolutely dependant, is want of gratitude, it is want of taste to converse with the first and greatest in the universe, and argues a heart insensible to the most consummate moral beauty and perfection. It is, besides, a plain proof that we are strangers to the noblest and most pleasing exercises of the mind. Where an object is beloved, nothing more natural than to cultivate the closest intimacy and friendship with it: indeed where the love is strong and sincere, the heart will be always tending towards it.

To offer up our prayers and thanksgivings to the Being who made us, and

who is the inexhaustible source of all the joy and happiness diffused throughout the creation, is a duty of reason and nature. To do this publicly in affectionate communion with our fellow creatures (who are children of the same common parent and supported by him) is so likewise; accordingly we find in almost every nation men have assembled themselves to do honour to what they called their God, or the duties which they held sacred. Is it not strange, that, notwithstanding all this, in a land of light and liberty, where men profess themselves to be Christians, the publick worship of God is by many so grossly neglected, by some altogether? This is a sad symptom that the heart is but little engaged in religion: what the effect of such example must be upon others, especially the young, I leave to the consciences of such as are guilty this way to determine. Certain it is, by such a practice they contribute their part to make others believe that there is nothing rational or improving in such attendance. Tho' one would think it must be evident to the attentive that mens assembling of themselves together to worship their Maker has a most direct tendency to keep up a sense of

of God and religion upon their minds, and of making them good and useful members of society : I mention nothing of our Saviour's commands in these matters. The truth is, he must be the worst or best of mortals who is not made better by attending such services. Surely, reasonable creatures appear in a light most honourable and becoming in the social worship of the Being who made them; it is an exercise the most solemn of all others, and which requires our calling forth the very best affections of the soul; it tends to beget in men that benevolence and those good dispositions which adorn human nature and render it truly amiable.

How thankful should protestant dissenters be (who have been so often persecuted on account of their religion) that they can meet together, and worship God according to their consciences, and none to make them afraid. For this their fathers endured most grievous sufferings, and with most unshaken resolution sacrificed what next to their integrity was dearest to them in life, that their sons might be left free and in possession of the truth: shall we, for whom the glorious purchase was

was intended, and who enjoy the blessings of liberty (a guest which makes glad and happy every country she takes up her abode in) shall we, I say, by a guilty indifference give up those invaluable privileges, and dishonestly betray the glorious trust committed to our care for posterity? How mean and unworthy of men must this appear? And with what contempt and indignity, notwithstanding all our pretensions to freedom and politeness, will our names be transmitted to succeeding generations! One would really be tempted to think that many in this age hardly esteem religious liberty a blessing, by the use they make of it: what would our protestant brethren, who at this present time in France are so grievously persecuted for worshiping God according to their consciences, and who cannot assemble but at the hazard of their lives; what, I say, would they give to enjoy what we think so little of? In great numbers do they assemble at the risque of every thing which is dear to them, while we, who are so highly favoured of heaven, would rather attend the call of pleasure, or any trifling amusement, than publicly acknowledge our dependance upon that

Being

Being who is the author of all our enjoyments. Such stupid inattention to religion and its services is a sad presage that real piety and virtue in the end will be great sufferers. It hath been observed that christians believe much, and know but little: how just the observation I shall not take upon me to determine. But I believe it may with more truth be affirmed, that beside much knowledge (which now abounds) there dwelleth a great negligence of God the source of all excellence, but little (to what might be expected) of that exactness and purity of life, that sanctity of heart and affections, and that refinement in manners, which should ever be the distinguishing glory of christians. But I quit so disagreeable a subject.

Let none imagine from what has been said in favour of attending the public worship of our Maker, that a bare attendance has any real merit in it, or that any services of this kind will recommend us to God, without virtue and a good life. No, nothing can possibly supersede the necessity of a strict universal obedience to the laws of God. But surely, if the social worship of God is closely connected with our improving in piety and goodness, if it is decent

cent and becoming, let not christians forsake the assembling of themselves together. All the public institutions of religion are only to be considered as means to make men virtuous and holy: in this light I recommend them as having a most excellent tendency; if this great end is not answered in us, we but mock God and deceive ourselves; without holiness of heart and life, the most regular attendance will but serve to our greater condemnation. To promote in men the divine life, to make them resemble God in purity, holiness, and goodness, is the end of all religion; and we should ever judge of our own sincerity by the effect which our religion has upon our lives and conversations; if by its influence we are delivered from the power of evil lusts and habits, from pride, ill-nature, uncharitableness, and the spirit of this world, if by its transforming power the taste is refined, the temper sweetened, if good-humour, gentleness, and kind affection reign in our hearts, if vice of every kind is far removed from us, every thing avoided and given up which conscience condemns, in a word, if our love to God and our charity to men are increased by it, we may then rest satisfied that

that our religion is of the right kind, for we are told that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness shall be accepted of him. Good men of every denomination and people will at last come from the east and from the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, while christians of impure lives, however distinguishing in this world, shall be cast out : there is no respect of persons with God. Here let me earnestly press upon men a serious review of their own principles and conduct, let the voice of conscience be thoroughly obeyed, for there is more reverence due to it, than to the whole world. What it pronounces to be wrong let us without hesitation fly from and avoid as our worst enemy and the destroyer of our peace, let us put ourselves intirely under the direction of reason and truth, and never after suffer ourselves to be drawn aside from their dictates; let us yield ourselves intirely to the service of God and virtue, then shall we appear truly honourable and glorious, we shall enjoy a peace and satisfaction in our own breasts, which time nor chance can never deprive us of, and to which the sons of riot and the children

dren of this world are utter strangers. Surely men should never be at rest with themselves till they are convinced of their own sincerity ; and I much question whether any man can be thoroughly satisfied of his own uprightness, if he can even suppose any circumstance in human life wherein he would part with his virtue and integrity ; his falling thro' weakness or surprize is a thing quite different from a supposition of this kind : let every man, as in the sight of God, ask himself, were he this moment to leave the world, what part of his conduct would he wish altered or undone ? An honest mind can be at no loss to make a proper improvement of this question ; happy they whose consciences are pleased with the part they have acted. Let them hold on but for a little time and all will be well. And let that most invaluable jewel their innocence be carefully preserved, for once lost, it never after can be found.

Let the sincere universal practice of religion be recommended to all ranks and degrees of men, let none imagine there is any thing gloomy and forbidding in it, or that it will deprive them of any pleasure which nature and reason warrants ; the
reverse

reverse of this is true : religion, which is free and heaven-born, is all joy and happiness; when cordially embraced, it brings along with it the chearful countenance, the glad heart, the easy mind, the peaceful conscience, and that true disengagement of spirit, which gives a relish to all the innocent pleasures and amusements of life ; in a word, if happiness of the noblest and most durable kind, if real self satisfaction, a joyful sense of God's favour, and a rational confidence towards him, if a happy death, and the most pleasing prospects into the heavenly world, are the most desirable of all things, and the truest riches in human life ; it is religion and virtue alone which can bestow them upon their votaries.

As a conclusion of the whole, let protestant dissenters be such upon principle and from conviction, let them be ambitious above all things to approve themselves to God and their own consciences, and to excell in those graces and virtues which become the dignity and hopes of the christian character. Let them meet together as so many lovers of God and mankind. And, banishing every thing narrow and superstitious far from them, let them with
honest

honest hearts and enlarged affections
 worship the common parent of the whole
 universe in spirit and in truth. Let them
 ever strive to be distinguished by the purity,
 goodness, and usefulness of their lives. If
 their cause is founded upon reason and
 truth, and hath no worldly claims, surely
 an indifference as to its prosperity and
 support is most unbecoming them and out
 of character. Let their zeal be always
 according to knowledge and generosity.
 Let them ever love and do what is right.
 Let a well-proportioned moderation, with
 every generous and liberal sentiment, be
 cultivated by them; for surely every thing
 contracted and narrow must appear with
 an ill grace in men whose charter is liberty
 and universal charity.

F I N I S.